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Dissatisfied both with lecturing to 125 students three times a week and with the idea of having teaching assistants conduct seminars, the author devised a new method of handling his class. With administration consent, he arranged to lecture to the whole class (by then, 275 students) twice a week and to conduct 11 seminars of 25 students each. These 13 classroom hours a week were his entire teaching load. At first meeting, the class was introduced to its "contract" with the instructor, the course workbook, the immediate-feedback testing method, the seminars, and the grading system. The workbook consisted of open-end questions derived from all segments of the course (lecture, seminar, text, and outside reading) and was the basis of all examination questions. The testing method, intended to give the students immediate feedback, is described in detail, as are the terms of the contract and the grading system. The last was designed to show the students' learning more accurately than the customary curve grading. The instructor added interest to the lectures by use of slides, film strips, etc., and by pre-arranged student illustrations of an idea. He also learned each student's name. Seminars were not necessarily coordinated with the lecture material, but instead encouraged the student to understand and express his feelings toward himself and society. The instructor found he saw more students in his office than in previous years, even those spent counseling. (HH)

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The One Course Class Load:

A First Step for Teaching General Psychology

in Community Colleges

by

Richard Maslow

San Joaquin Delta College, Stockton, California

Presented at the

American Psychological Association Convention

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INFORMATION

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I strongly believe in the old proverb that states, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step." My journey began two years ago, and this paper is a recounting of the first steps of that journey.

During the past two years, I have been teaching large lecture - small seminar General Psychology courses at San Joaquin Delta College, Stockton, California. Because this type of presentation has been successful, both from the students' and my point of view, I would like to share with you some of the ideas which, I feel,have made it work.

To trace the history of our large classes, I must go back three years to the time I taught--or better, lectured to--125 students three times a week. Although the administration was pleased with this arrangement, I felt frustrated; I was not pleased with the teacher-student relationship nor with the teaching-learning process. The student and I were separated by a thousand miles, and I had to travel that gap alone, so I often missed linking up with them.

This discontent led to a trip to the Los Angeles area, during which a number of Delta College instructors visited forum classes in six Los Angeles area junior colleges. Although the physical facilities for these classes were more than adequate and the lectures themselves excellent, many of the seminar sections were handled by instructors other than the forum lecturer. This brought back the negative feelings I and other fellow students had had toward teaching assistants on the university level. That thousand mile gap was still there. For this reason I felt dissatisfied with the programs I had seen. I believe that if we junior college instructors are to be more than just faces to our students, we must be where the action is and be involved with the actions. If we are to be effective in our profession and carry out the ideas presented in our lectures, we must be in the classroom leading our own seminar groups; for this is the only way we can meet and know our students.

From this idea, the direction for the "first step" evolved. The administration committed itself to try a General Psychology class of two hundred students. The students would attend two large lectures a week and then be divided into small seminar groups for a third meeting. I felt that fifteen students per seminar section would be most effective; the administration felt that twenty-five students per seminar section would be more economical. We compromised on twenty-five.

Because the teaching-learning experience was, I felt, quite successful that first year, I have been able to move another step forward to bigger and better things. Currently I teach one class of 275 students. This class meets for lecture two hours a week and then is divided into eleven seminar groups of twenty-five each. This approach keeps me in the classroom thirteen hours a week and allows me to concentrate on keeping my course up to date and making it relevant to the needs of the students. This one class is my entire teaching load.

At the first meeting of the lecture section of the class, the students are introduced to the format of the class through a set of ground rules especially devised for this course. This "contract" between the class members and me informs each student of his responsibility. At the same time he learns about the course workbook, the immediate-feedback testing method used in the class, the seminars, and my grading system, all of which are most likely unfamilar to him. (A copy of these ground rules is attached.)

**Note p. 5

I have heard many speakers talk about the necessity to write out the educational objectives of your course so that the students know what you want them to learn; for in far too many cases, the only way a student entering class in September can be sure of what he is expected to have learned by January is for him to steal the final examination. Neither the setting out of precise objectives nor the stealing of the final examination seems to me to be a creative approach to education. To remedy this student-teacher guessing game, I wrote a workbook for my course.* This workbook is comprised of open-end questions that can be answered in a few words, a phrase, or a sentence. The answers to the workbook questions come from several sources: from the lectures, from the seminars, from the text, and from outside reading--from, in essence, total involvement with the course and the material. Thus, many students are able to achieve beyond what might be called the normal objectives of the course, for the students are involved in learning creatively, not just preparing for set examinations. The workbook material also provides the basis for all examination questions.

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*The idea for a workbook individualized for one's own course came from my friend and colleague, Dr. Harry Mahan of Palomar College.

In the matter of examinations, my thinking has changed radically in the last few years. I used to grade on a curve--the best student could score 87% and receive an A. Although this is a simple solution to the problem of evaluating a student's performance, I feel that it is conceding as excellent the work of a student who has missed 13% of the material. By grading on the curve, I was letting the students set the grade standards for the course. With the advent of the workbook, I have eliminated this situation. First, the students are not tested on material that has not been covered and discussed in one form or another. Second, I maintain control over the quality and grade standards of the course. Thus, through the use of the workbook, the more active role in the teaching-learning process has been turned over to the student, and my classroom has become what Rogers calls a community of learners. Because the students have had an opportunity to be familiar with the material to be covered in a test situation, I have every right to expect high quality work.

**Note p. 5

All tests in my course are multiple choice tests given on immediate feedback answer sheets. As the student chooses the a, b, c, or d answer, he is immediately informed by the answer sheet whether his selection is correct. The a,b,c, and d response areas are covered with a carbon surface; thus the student, when he erases, will find an R (meaning right) or a W (meaning wrong).** The student works on one question until he finds the R. This method makes each test truly a learning experience, as the student is shown the correct answer to each question as soon as he has attempted it. Immediate knowledge of results, as we know, is an effective tool of learning.

**Note p. 5

The tests are graded by the number of erasures needed to find the R. If the R is found with first erasure, the student scores three points. If the correct answer is found with the second erasure, the student scores two points. No points are given for the third or fourth try. If a forty question test is given, the maximum points would be 120 (40x3). These tests are graded on a percentage basis: 93% and up is the A bracket. 83% to 92% is the B bracket; 75% to 82% is the C bracket. There are no D's or F's. If a student does not score at least 75% (90 of a possible 120 points), he has the opportunity to take the test again, twice. Thus, each student has three attempts to pass the test and meet the criterion for the C grade, or 75%. I have arranged the scoring on the tests so that the student cannot score higher than 82% the second time he takes the test, or higher than a high C. If a student takes the test a third time, he cannot score higher than 75%, the minimum passing score. The re-tests are an alternate form of the original test, the student facing the same questions in a different order.

A student cannot take the second major examination until he has passed the first. In almost all courses, a student who fails to learn the material covered on the first test will never learn it at all, or perhaps may never even see it again. However, in my

**See VVN&N Added Explanatory Notes—p. 5

course the student is forced to stay with the prime material until he passes the test covering it, thus achieving a solid foundation on which the advanced work can be built. The student who does not pass the first test after three tries is told that his chances for making a passing grade in the course--a C or better--are highly improbable.

Because two-thirds of the class work is lecture time, I have made a special effort to avoid the stereotyped, sterile, stand-up, robot reading note type lecture that is boring and meaningless to both the student and the instructor. I have tried to make my lecture sessions active, dynamic, almost group participation affairs. I use one or more of the following devices each lecture period: overhead transparencies, film strips, films, and slides. I also use audience plants, students who help me demonstrate a point by playing a preplanned game,to illustrate a point. These devices are designed to make the abstract ideas concrete by giving them a meaningful, identifiable formulation. There are two points that emphasize the transactional value of the lecture session; first, the students never have the feeling that they are attending a formal lecture section. I have been, I feel, successful in establishing the idea that what is going on is an informal talk session, although each segment has been carefully planned. Second, I make a point to learn each student's name, 275 names a semester. Calling a student by name when he has a question, in other words distinguishing him in a large group, give the lecture session a cohesiveness. The student is not just a face in a large group.

In the weekly seminar sessions, there is very little effort made to coordinate the activities with the lecture material, as the seminars are a series of weekly games designed to help the student understand himself and express his feelings concerning his society. These weekly seminars are not all fun and games, as the students involve themselves seriously in complex and trying situations--they have in these sessions the opportunity to take a critical look at themselves and their milieu. The twenty-five students per seminar section has not turned out to be as confining as I had first thought it would be. I have been able to maintain good flexibility. Many of our exercises call for breaking a section into groups of six to eight students, which allows and encourages 100% participation. As an extension of the small groups, I have seen during this last year more students in my office for one to one talks than I had seen in previous years, including those years I served as a counselor. I feel that the seminars have been quite successful in opening the students up to themselves and others. And once opened, they need but just a little prodding with their new-found self-discovery. The most important outgrowth of the seminars has been in this area of self-discovery, for I feel that many of the students have come to see themselves for the first time as viable, meaningful individuals, aware of themselves and society and the complexities of both.

In conclusion, I have come to feel that large classes are not inherently bad, that they may offer one solution to the teaching-learning process. Good planning and the ability to lecture to large groups and to keep quiet in the small groups may well be the basic keys to effective teaching.

I certainly have not completed my thousand mile journey, but I believe that I have taken the first steps in a worthwhile direction. In sharing these steps with you, I hope that I have also shared some of my enthusiasm and ambition for continuing that thousand mile journey.

**Added Explanatory Notes

Page 3: Answer responses can be of the "fixed" type, such as "R-W-W" or "R-X-X", etc., wherein "R" always means right or correct, and "W" or "X" always means wrong. They can also be of the "variable" type, such as "T-E-H-L", wherein the instructor can designate before a quiz any one of the 4 letters as being the correct answer for that quiz; for further details, see VVN&N folder—Form X-196ac.

**Pages 2, 3 & Last Page:

Underlining added.

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(see over)

GROUND RULES FOR GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY

Richard Maslow, Instructor

1. Each student will attend lecture sessions on Monday and Friday, and one assigned seminar section during each week. ATTENDANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT.

2. Traditionally college classes have made the teaching the active part and the learning the passive part of the educational process. I would like to change this concept.

   Through the use of the workbook the course material for general psychology will be made available to you. The workbook has questions dealing with the subject matter for this course that will help you better understand human behavior. Your responses to the workbook questions will make you active learners. In lectures I will be a resource to provide answers to those same questions.

   These workbook questions are the bases for questions to be used for class tests.

3. Tests will be given at the end of grouped units. Immediate feedback answer sheets will be used and the test will be administered as transparencies projected on the screen. The answer sheets will let you know whether you have answered a question correctly as you take the test. If you get a question wrong you will continue to answer the question until you get it right. Your grade for each test will depend on the number of attempts you make to get each question right.

*Note p. 5

The passing minimum will be 75%. No test grades lower than 75% (minimum "C" grade) will be acceptable. If a student gets less than 75% he will repeat the test with the hope of getting a "C" grade on the retest. A student will get a maximum of three attempts to pass the test. If a student passes on the second try he may get any score in the "C" range (75% to 82%). If he does not pass on three tries, a grade of 50% will be recorded, making a final grade of "B" almost impossible and a "C" improbable.

Grades will be figured as follows:

"C"	range	75-82%
"B"	range	83-92%
"A"	range	93% & up

With all work handed in, those students maintaining an average of 95% for all tests prior to final will be excused from the final.